

**Statement of  
Susan LaChance  
Manager  
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United States Postal Service  
before the  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Subcommittee on Benefits  
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. My name is Susan LaChance. I am the Manager of Selection, Evaluation, and Recognition for the United States Postal Service.

The United States Postal Service has a long tradition of employing America's veterans in large numbers. We and the various branches of the U.S. military grew up together as our young nation expanded and matured over the past two hundred years.

As our nation's military deployment needs have evolved, including greater reliance on its Reserve Components, our efforts in support of those needs have evolved as well. We continue to innovate as times change and as we identify areas where we can provide additional support.

With more employees called up for longer periods of time in the post-911 world, I am glad to have the opportunity to learn about best practices and share information with my peers across the nation on improving our USERRA-related programs.

I am particularly pleased to be able to hear first-hand how other employers are innovating and meeting employee needs with regard to USERRA in these changing times.

For the Postal Service, the most important part of our efforts is ensuring that our employees who serve our nation in both a civilian and military capacity receive the employment benefits and protections they are entitled to under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994.

So, I take my responsibility for developing the Postal Service's implementation policies for USERRA very seriously. We understand that USERRA is an essential tool that our Armed Forces need to be able to continue to recruit and retain qualified men and women. We strongly and publicly support USERRA.

In fact, during last year's Veterans Day ceremonies, Postmaster General Jack Potter re-pledged our commitment by signing a statement of support for the Guard and Reserve.

This statement of support was published in our Postal Bulletin for national distribution, and all field offices were instructed to post it prominently in their facilities.

Now, as I review our Reserve and Guard statistics with you, it is helpful to keep in mind that our numbers with regard to serving personnel are, of necessity, approximations. This is because many postal employees exercise their USERRA right to use annual vacation leave during some or all of their time on military duty. As a result, they may not be tracked as on military leave by our timekeeping systems.

The Postal Service employs more than 212,000 veterans, including more than 70,000 who are disabled. And, of that number, nearly 18,000 have a disability rating of more than 30 percent.

Currently, we have some 13,000 men and women who proudly serve our country twice, both as postal employees and as members of the Reserve Component of America's Armed Forces.

Additionally, approximately 30,000 other Postal Service employees completed their service in the Reserve Components while working for the Postal Service and are members of the Retired Reserve.

Since 9/11, approximately 8,000 of our employees have been called to duty to assist in the defense of the nation in various capacities here and abroad. In fact, for our most recent two-week pay period, more than 3,400 employees were currently on military duty. That means, approximately one quarter of our entire Reserve Component membership was on military duty during the first two weeks of July.

These employees serving in the Armed Forces receive paid military leave benefits like those provided by other federal agencies.

For example, we provide postal employees with 15 days of paid military leave and are currently in the process of implementing procedures to pay the full cost of health insurance for up to 18 months for any of our employees on active military duty.

As in the administration of any policy, the Postal Service has developed a number of proactive steps to ensure that both reservists and managers understand USERRA.

For example, in-house Labor and Human Resource publications highlight and explain our policies on a regular basis to those field personnel with the responsibility to see that they are properly implemented.

This year, we began offering specific USERRA training to human resource and labor relations specialists in the field. So far, we have provided this training to 125 of these specialists. We intend to provide additional outreach education in 2004.

Postal Service managers also keep in contact with the Department of Labor to review information and to obtain advice on applying USERRA to specific situations.

The Employer Committee for Support of the Guard and Reserve's (ESGR) mission is to obtain support for our Guard and Reserve forces across the federal government and the private sector. We actively support ESGR and maintain a liaison with the national office. We are also in the process of identifying and assigning a liaison to work with each of the ESGR's state committees.

The Postal Service is the nation's second largest employer of men and women who also serve in the National Guard and Reserve. We are an organization that reaches into every city and town in the country. Communications with our employees – whether their jobs are in post offices, in mail processing facilities, or delivering mail to every home and business in America – is extremely important to us.

Communication involves many outlets, tools, and publications to ensure that we are all always on the same page in our operations and policies.

This communication is critical at every stage of the process as our employees are called up for service, so we are constantly looking for ways to provide information quickly and conveniently to our employees.

One tool is our intranet site, which lists a number of publications and has links to military affairs offices to assist our employees with any questions they might have about this complex topic.

Of course, local personnel officials are also available to answer employee questions directly.

In addition, our Employment and Placement Handbook comprehensively defines how we administer USERRA. Additional instructions to management personnel concerning the benefits available to members of our Armed Forces are also located in our Employee and Labor Relations Manual – a compendium of our administrative policies related to personnel issues

Both of these publications are available in hard copy and on our website, so our employees can easily access detailed information about our policies and procedures regarding military service.

The Handbook spells out our position very clearly. It states, “The Postal Service supports employee service in the Reserve or National Guard, and no action is permitted to discourage either voluntary or involuntary participation.”

Employees may be absent to participate in drills or meetings scheduled by the National Guard or Reserve Units of the armed forces; to attend usual summer training periods and to perform any other duty ordered by the National Guard and Reserve Units of the Armed Forces.

We have issued a Standard Operating Procedure for all employees as they enter USERRA-covered military service. This includes providing them with a letter with specific information – in detail – about their leave, benefits and status while on military duty.

So, you can see that we work hard to accommodate the needs of our employees called to duty by our nation’s military. We also provide support for their families.

Our Employee Assistance Program offers counseling for employees and their families. And the Employee Assistance Program website has helpful information on a number of topics related to military deployment, including Deployment from a Spouse's Viewpoint; Keeping In Touch With Your Spouse During Military Separation; Coping With Separation; Preparing Children for When Their Parents Are Deployed; What to Do When Loved Ones in the Military Are Deployed; Steps To Making Family Separation Manageable; and Supervisors Tips about USERRA.

We also provide a link to DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service website and to the fact sheet that Veterans' Employment and Training Service developed about USERRA.

We continually look at how to improve the services we provide to our employees and their families. As we see ways to improve communications and programs for USERRA-covered employees, we will continue to implement them nation-wide as quickly and effectively as possible.

We are proud of the efforts of postal employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve. We recognize their vital importance to support the interests of our nation and its people when called upon to do so.

We will continue our efforts to assist them, both as co-workers and through our USERRA responsibilities, not because it is mandated, but because these dedicated employees deserve our full support and commitment for their dual duties on behalf of the American people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.

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